



UCF

Ginsburg Center for Inclusion
and Community Engagement

UNIVERSITY OF CENTRAL FLORIDA

14th Annual Student Success Conference

BOLD BEGINNINGS:

Intentional Steps,
Extraordinary Outcomes



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01.

A message from the Vice President

Dear Students,

Welcome to the 2026 Student Success Conference!

This year's theme, **Bold Beginnings: Intentional Steps, Extraordinary Outcomes**, is especially meaningful as you begin your journey at UCF. As the first person in my family to attend college, I remember what it felt like to begin something I had never experienced before. I did not always know what questions to ask, where to find the answers, or what opportunities were available to me. I learned along the way, and I learned the importance of having people who believed in me and helped me navigate the journey.

That is why I believe so strongly in this conference and, more importantly, in you.

Over the next few days, I encourage you to be intentional. Take time to discover your strengths, build relationships, ask questions, and learn about the people and resources that can support you at UCF. Think about the habits you want to develop now that will shape not only your college experience, but your future.

Your journey will be uniquely yours. You may not know exactly where it will lead, and that is okay. What matters is that you take the next step with purpose, remain open to learning, and recognize that you do not have to navigate it alone.

I want you to know that you belong here. You have people here who believe in you. And the choices you make today can create extraordinary outcomes tomorrow.

I am proud to welcome you to UCF and excited to see where your journey takes you. Welcome to the Knight family!

Warm regards,

Dr. Andrea I. Guzman
Vice President, Access and Community Engagement



02.

Program Schedule ✨

FRIDAY

4 p.m.	Registration
5:30 p.m.	Opening Ceremonies Welcome from Provost Dr. John Buckwaler and 2BEUCF Dancers, Knightro & Cheerleaders
6:30 p.m.	Dinner at Café Gauguin

SATURDAY

8 a.m.	Breakfast and Morning Speakers Welcome from Dr. Guzman, TikTalks with Josh Rosen and Dr. Carolyn Messiah, and Keynote from Strother Gaines
10 a.m.	Breakout Sessions I and II
12:20 p.m.	Lunch and TikTalks
2 p.m.	Break Out Sessions III and IV
4:30 p.m.	Keynote with Antonio Robinson
6:30 p.m.	Dinner at Café Gauguin

SUNDAY

8 a.m.	Breakfast and Morning Speakers Keynotes from Dr. Adrienne Frame, and Mason Mincey & Derek Saltzman
10 a.m.	Break Out Sessions V and VI
12:20 p.m.	Group Photo, Lunch, and Reflection
1:30 p.m.	Load Busses and Departure

03.

Conference Goals ✨

ESTABLISH a strong foundation for success identifying personal strengths, support networks, growth opportunities, and success habits that will serve as the foundation for your academic and personal journey at UCF.

ENGAGE in meaningful connections by navigating university expectations, building supportive relationships with peers, faculty, staff, and campus resources and developing actionable strategies that promote academic achievement and personal well-being.

CULTIVATE habits that promote long-term success by applying behaviors and practices that contribute to future outcomes such as academic excellence, leadership development, graduate school preparation, and career readiness.

04.

Breakout Sessions ✨

SATURDAY

Sessions I & II

From Contempt to Dignity - Salon 1

Sorry to This Man: How to Make Connections vs Contacts - Salon 2

Play to Your Strengths - Salon 3

Elevate your Impact: Recognizing Yourself as a Leader - Salon 4

AI, Your Brain, and Your Future: How to Use AI Without Letting It Use You - Salon 10

Reality Check - A Budgeting Simulation Game - Salon 11/12

Sessions III & IV

Building Your Own Personal Brand While Charging On at UCF - Salon 1

Passport to Possibility: How Study Abroad Changed My Life - Salon 2

Mind Matters: Building Your College Mental Health Toolkit - Salon 3

Show Up, Stand Out: Professionalism for College and Beyond - Salon 4

Own Your Writing: Expert Tutors Share Tips for Success - Salon 10

My Credit Score Impacts What: Wise Use of Credit - Salon 11/12

SUNDAY

Sessions V & VI

From Freshman to Future - Salon 1

Mission Ready: Building the Discipline to Succeed at UCF - Salon 2

The First 90: Start Different. Finish Different - Salon 3

Cracking the Code: How to Be a Mentor - Salon 4

Plotting Your Path: No Map, No Problem - Salon 10

Financial Foundations: Small Steps, Extraordinary Outcomes - Salon 11/12



05.

Session Descriptions ✨

From Contempt to Dignity: learning how to disagree better

Presenter(s): Dr. Lua Hancock and Ashly Rodriguez Reyes from Phoenix Generation

We all want to be treated with dignity, but don't often see that role modeled around us online or in our algorithms. The Phoenix generation works with college students to gain skills in dialogue and community building. In this workshop participants will learn how to use the Dignity Index, a practical tool for looking at how we communicate, especially when we disagree.

Lead by current UCF students and alumni, this training goes beyond discussing concepts. The goal is to practice them, so you can recognize and apply the Dignity Index in everyday conversation. And- it is a skill that employers want to see as well!

Sorry to This Man: How to Make Connections vs Contacts

Presenter(s): Dr. Darryl Gordon

There's a big difference between collecting contacts and building meaningful connections. In this fun, interactive session, participants will explore how to move beyond simply exchanging information or adding someone on LinkedIn to creating authentic relationships that can support their personal, academic, and professional success. Participants will practice how to confidently make connections, follow up with intention, and cultivate relationships that last long after the first introduction.

Play to Your Strengths

Presenter(s): Strother Gains

What if the fastest path to your professional edge wasn't fixing your weaknesses, but learning to play to what you already do best? In this high-energy, hands-on session, Strother Gains pairs proven CliftonStrengths methodology with the mechanics of play to help you name, claim, and aim your natural talents. Through games, role-play, and improv, you'll map your top strengths, learn how to turn each one up or down, and see how your talents combine with the people around you to level up as a team. Part strengths coaching and part play therapy, you'll leave with a clearer picture of who you are at your best and how to bring that person forward more often.

Elevate your Impact: Recognizing Yourself as a Leader

Presenter(s): UCF SG

Are you prepared to elevate your leadership skills? Join Student Government's Executive Branch to learn how you already possess the qualities needed to lead. In this engaging session, you will explore your personal leadership style, hear insightful stories from student leaders, and gain practical tools to enhance your impact both on campus and beyond. Whether you are just beginning or already active in leadership roles, this session will help you recognize and develop your leadership potential.

AI, Your Brain, and Your Future: How to Use AI Without Letting It Use You

Presenter(s): Dr. Elizabeth Giltner

How do you graduate with real skills in a world where AI can already do your work? This interactive workshop will focus on students' desired futures, identity formation, developing effective study habits, and ethics in an AI-infused world.

Reality Check: Budgeting Simulator

Presenter(s): Regions Bank

Congratulations! You've just graduated and landed your first job. Now it's time to make some important decisions about housing, transportation, cell phone service, and more. That's the situation students will face in the new Reality Check game.

Students will receive a salary and navigate a variety of financial choices, including a few unexpected surprises, while balancing their check register along the way. It's an engaging and practical way to learn an essential real-life skill. Give it a try!

Building Your Own Personal Brand While Charging On at UCF

Presenter(s): Dr. Carolyn Massiah.

Your personal brand is being built long before you need a résumé or step into your first career. In this interactive session, students will explore how their experiences, relationships, involvement, and choices at UCF can help shape the reputation they want to build. Students will identify the qualities they want to be known for, consider how to make intentional choices throughout their college experience, and create a personalized "Knight Brand Statement" to guide their growth and involvement at UCF.

Passport to Possibility: How Study Abroad Changed My Life

Presenter(s): Matt Ryan and Mariah Fisher

Join Matt Ryan, Associate Director of Study Abroad, and Mariah Fisher, for an inspiring, interactive session that blends real stories, myth-busting quizzes, and practical tips to launch your own international adventure. Discover how study abroad can change your life and start planning your journey today!

Mind Matters: Building Your College Mental Health Toolkit

Presenter(s): Ashley Allette

Starting college is exciting but it can also bring stress, pressure, homesickness, and unexpected challenges. This interactive workshop will help incoming students understand the importance of mental well-being and learn practical strategies for managing stress, building healthy habits, recognizing when they may need support, and finding campus resources. Students will leave with tools to help them care for themselves, support their peers, and build a strong foundation for their college experience.

Show Up, Stand Out: Professionalism for College & Beyond

Presenter(s): Denise McFadden

Professionalism starts long before your first full-time job. In this interactive session, students will explore how everyday choices—from how they communicate and show up to what they post online—can shape how they are perceived. Through real-world scenarios and activities, students will learn how to navigate common college situations, build positive habits, and strengthen their professional reputation. Students will leave with practical strategies they can use throughout college and into their future careers.

Own Your Writing: Expert Tutors Share Tips for Success

Presenter(s): UCF Writing Center

Join experienced University Writing Center staff as they share tips, habits, and practical strategies for getting the most out of your writing in any class while also successfully navigating the UCF student experience

My Credit Score Impacts What? Understanding Credit Reports & Credit Scores

Presenter(s): Regions Bank

Your credit score can impact much more than your ability to get a credit card. Learn how credit works, how to read and understand your credit report, and practical strategies for building and maintaining healthy credit. With tools and resources from Regions Next Step, you'll gain the knowledge and confidence to use credit wisely and take steps toward your financial goals.

From Freshman to Future: Start Your Career Before You Need a Career

Presenter(s): D'Bria Bradshaw

Success rarely follows a straight path. In this engaging and inspiring session, D'Bria Bradshaw shares how setbacks, failures, leadership experiences, and civic engagement opportunities helped shape her personal and professional journey. Students will explore how getting involved early, whether through community engagement, student organizations, service, advocacy, internships, or leadership roles, can build valuable skills that translate across careers in business, law, education, public service, and beyond.

Participants will leave with practical strategies for turning challenges into growth opportunities and taking intentional steps now that can create extraordinary outcomes in their future careers.

Mission Ready: Building the Discipline to Succeed at UCF

Presenter(s): Mike Kepner

Success in college rarely happens by accident. Drawing on principles used in military training and leadership, this workshop explores practical strategies for preparing, planning, staying disciplined, working with others, adapting when things don't go as planned, and taking ownership of your goals. Whether your "mission" is passing your first semester, balancing competing priorities, or building a path toward your future career, you'll leave with tools you can put into practice immediately at UCF.

The First 90: Start Different. Finish Different

Presenter(s): Antonio Robinson

College success rarely comes down to one big decision. It is built through small choices repeated consistently. In this interactive workshop, students will turn the ideas introduced during the keynote into a personal 90-day success strategy. Participants will identify the people, habits, opportunities, boundaries, and intentional actions that can shape their first semester while working through realistic scenarios they may encounter along the way. Students will leave with their own First 90 Blueprint, a practical framework designed to help them move from good intentions to intentional action and begin building the habits that can lead to extraordinary outcomes.

Cracking the Code: How to Be a Mentor

Presenter(s): UCF SOAR Mentors

Cracking the Code: How to Be a Mentor explores the essential skills needed to build strong and meaningful mentoring relationships. Participants will learn practical strategies for building trust, communicating effectively, providing guidance, and empowering mentees to reach their goals.

Plotting Your Path: No Map, No Problem

Presenter(s): Gabrielle Torres

Starting college often comes with uncertainty, and many students begin their undergraduate journey without a clear roadmap. In this session, participants will explore practical strategies for navigating the early years of college with confidence and purpose. Drawing from personal undergraduate experiences, this workshop will cover key approaches for personal growth, building meaningful connections, getting involved on campus, and taking advantage of opportunities that support academic and professional development. Attendees will leave with actionable tools and resources to help them create their own path and make the most of their undergraduate experience.

Financial Foundations: Small Steps, Extraordinary Outcomes

Presenter(s): Samantha Redlund, Assistant Director & Kristina Chavers, Associate Director Student Financial Assistance

Your financial future starts with the choices you make today. Join us for an engaging and empowering conversation designed to help Knights take intentional steps toward financial confidence and success. Discover practical strategies for managing your money, creating a realistic budget, saving with limited resources, and avoiding common debt pitfalls. Whether you're just beginning your financial journey or looking to strengthen your current habits, learn how small, intentional choices can create lasting impact. Leave with the knowledge and confidence to build a strong financial foundation and turn today's steps into tomorrow's extraordinary outcomes.

THANK YOU

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Herb Maharaj
President

Keynote Speakers

Strother Gaines



Strother is an innovative leader operating at the intersection of play, creativity, and personal growth. As “The Adult Play Therapist,” he is on a mission to revolutionize the way adults approach well-being by integrating the transformative power of play into every aspect of life. With a rich background in theatre, gaming, immersive experiences, and therapy/coaching, Strother creates spaces where individuals can rediscover their authentic selves, explore new narratives, and navigate change with a sense of joy and curiosity.

His work is guided by a commitment to authenticity, empathy, and a deep respect for each person’s unique journey. He empowers clients to take ownership of their growth, crafting bespoke solutions that help them thrive in any environment. Whether through one-on-one therapy and coaching, corporate consulting, or immersive theatrical productions, Strother



invites everyone to bring a little razzle-dazzle into their lives and find beauty in the unconventional.

With a TEDx Talk on Immersive Storytelling that has been viewed by thousands and a career

that spans multiple creative and professional disciplines, Strother’s work reminds us that growth doesn’t have to be painful and that serious transformation can start with a little fun. He holds dual Master’s degrees in social work (MSW) and business administration (MBA), looks pretty good in purple, and used to be a Segway tour guide on the National Mall. He is dedicated to helping others unlock their full potential, creating a world where play is not just a pastime but a vital tool for growth, healing, and connection.



Antonio L. Robinson M.A.

Antonio L. Robinson, M.A., is an educator, strategist, entrepreneur, and nationally recognized presenter whose career has been dedicated to expanding opportunity and helping students turn potential into progress. With more than 25 years of experience in education, Robinson currently serves at Trident Technical College, where his leadership includes TRIO Upward Bound Math & Science and Minority Teacher Development. A TRIO alumnus himself, his work is grounded in a deeply held belief that student success is rarely the result of a single moment. It is cultivated through relationships, intentional environments, meaningful expectations, and people willing to see possibility in students before the outcome is visible.

Beyond his institutional leadership, Robinson is CEO of ALR Consulting, Co-Founder of the Minority Education Initiative, and Co-Founder of AI Guy Solutions, where he helps educators, institutions, and professionals thoughtfully integrate emerging technologies into human-centered practice. A former Charleston Regional Business Journal Forty Under 40 honoree and Past President of the South Carolina TRIO Association, Robinson brings together decades of experience in mentorship, student development, organizational leadership, entrepreneurship, and innovation. Whether working with students or the professionals who serve them, his message remains consistent: meaningful outcomes are built intentionally, and transformation begins long before success becomes something we can measure.



Dr. Adrienne Frame

Dr. Adrienne Frame serves as the Vice President for Student Success and Well-Being at the University of Central Florida. In this role, Dr. Frame has oversight and supervision for Student Life, Community Support, Student Rights and Responsibilities, Wellness, Housing and Residence Life, and First Year Transition.

As a dedicated, passionate, and inclusive student-centered educator, Dr. Frame has a distinguished record of more than 29 years of service to the field of Student Affairs. She has been active in regional and national organizations, including service as the President of the Southeastern Association of Housing Officers (SEAHO) and as a faculty member for the Jim Grimm National Housing Training Institute (NHTI) and for SEAHO's Regional Entry Level Institute (RELI). She has authored a book chapter on lessons learned from crisis response, has presented at conferences at the regional and national level, and has delivered several invited keynote addresses.

Dr. Frame is energized by opportunities to work with students toward the achievement of their goals and in building coalitions of faculty, staff, and student leaders at all levels of the academy to imagine and realize collective objectives and favorable outcomes.



Derek Saltzman

Materials Engineer with experience in Carbon, Ceramic, and natural Fiber Composites. Focusing specifically on Nanocomposites and Material Processing.

My team and I co-founded a startup called SOARCE, a performance NANO ADDITIVES COMPANY transforming biomass into performance nano materials through our proprietary refinery process. We make composites parts lighter, stronger, and at a fraction of the cost

I have worked to receive NSF grants and publications focused on developing high performance Nanomaterial dispersions and processing techniques for composite materials.



Mason Mincey

I build high-performance materials that start in nature and scale for industry. As a co-founder at Soarce, I lead the product and commercialization work to turn low-impact feedstocks (seaweed, hemp, industrial biomass) into nanocellulose and nature-first chemistries to make materials better across textiles, composites, coatings, and construction

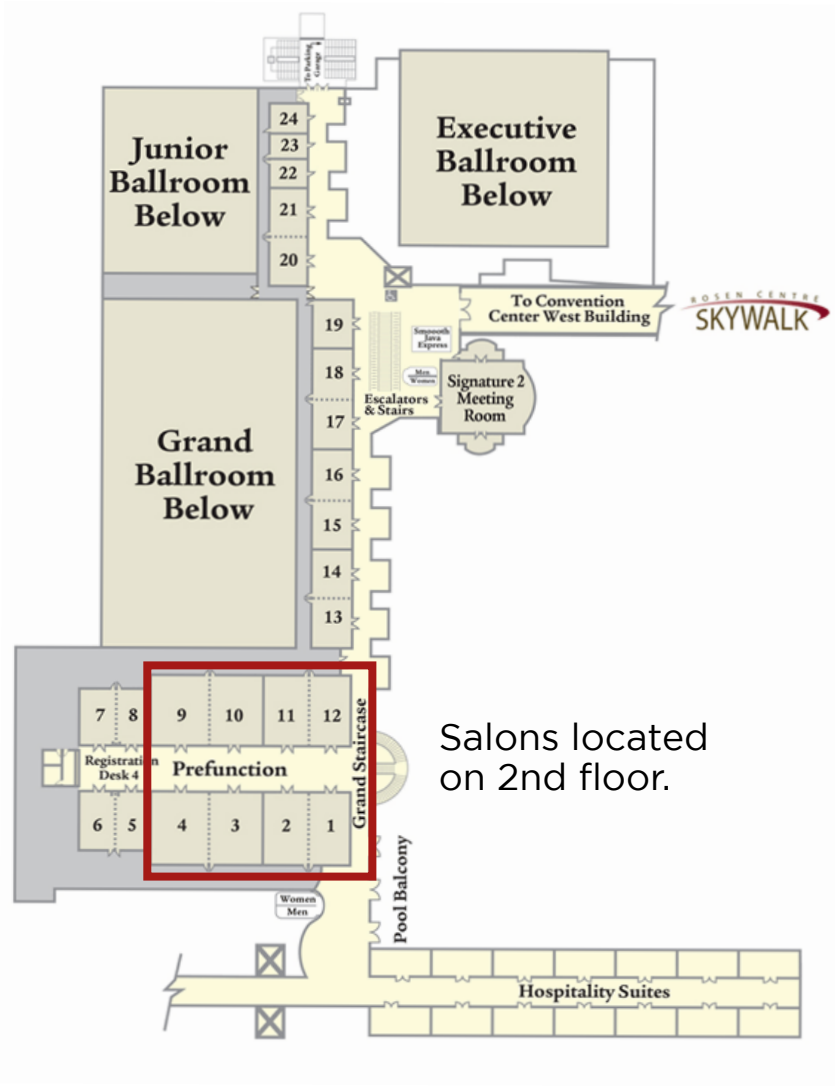
My technical foundation comes from research at the University of Central Florida, where I helped drive pioneering work in nanomaterial processing and secured multiple NSF grants. At the Textile Exchange I translated technical insight into practical guidance — co-authoring the influential Future of Synthetics report and producing market-facing sustainability analysis used by brands including Nike, Adidas, and Lululemon.

Recognized early for impact and leadership (named among 25 Under 25 and ESG Analytics 30 Under 30), I bring together lab discipline and go-to-market execution: piloting product integrations, designing scalable processes, and partnering with OEMs to prove performance and economics.

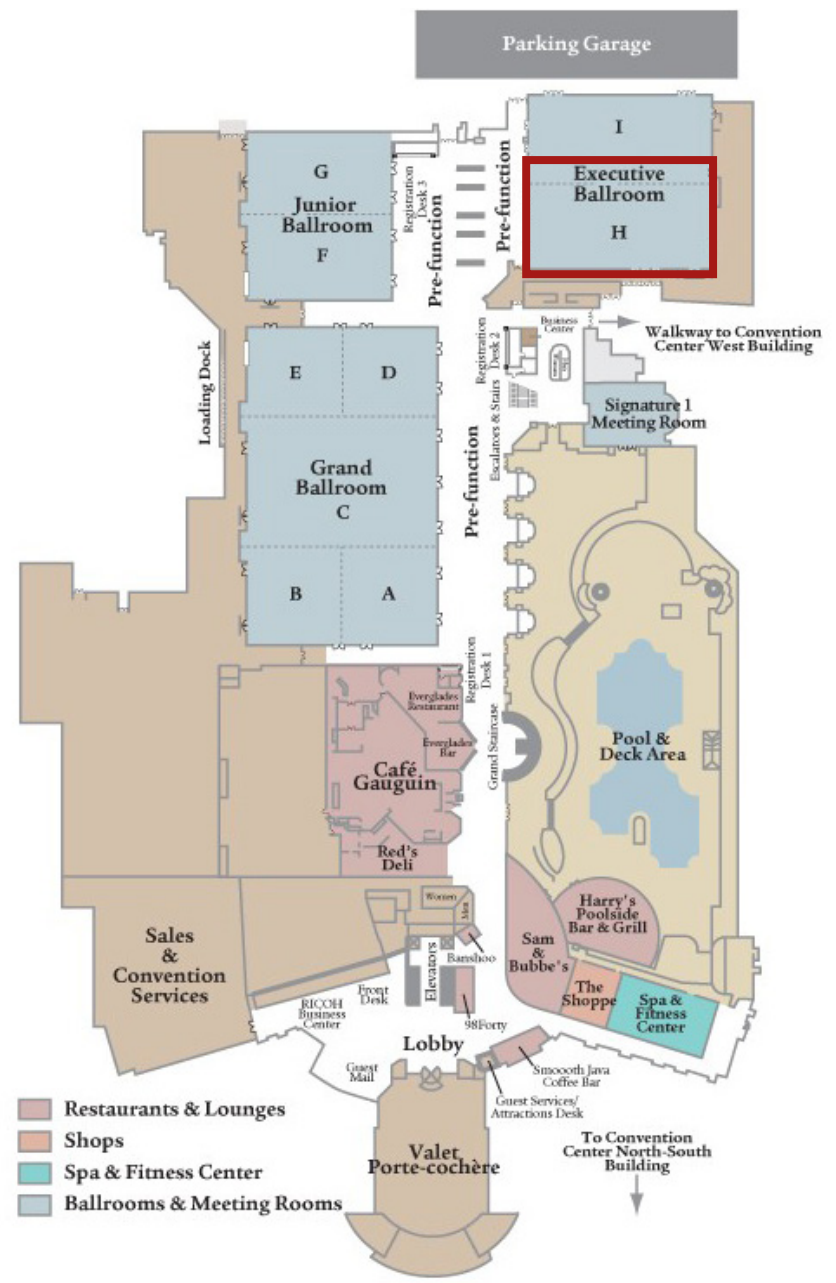


Resort Maps

Map of 2nd Floor Conference Hall



Map of Main Hotel and 1st floor of Conference Hall



**Thank you for attending the 14th annual
Student Success Conference**



Special thanks to:

the Rosen Centre Hotel;

our Presenters and Keynote Speakers;

UCF staff, peer mentors, student and graduate assistants;

our volunteers, and the Ginsburg Family Foundation, Inc.